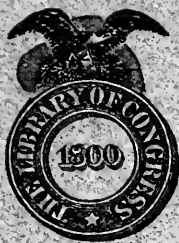


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Author _____

Title _____

Imprint _____

BROWN UNIVERSITY

UNDER THE

PRESIDENCY OF ASA MESSER, S.T.D., LL.D.

BY AN ALUMNUS.



BOSTON:
PUBLISHED BY CROSBY & AINSWORTH,
117 WASHINGTON STREET.
1867.

SOURCE UNKNOWN

DEC 5 1944

PRESS OF GEO. C. RAND & AVERY, 3 CORNHILL.

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BROWN UNIVERSITY

UNDER THE

PRESIDENCY OF ASA MESSER, S.T.D. LL.D.

BY AN ALUMNUS.

THE Commencement of Brown University in 1866 was marked by a public service of very uncommon interest to the alumni, and of no little interest to all scholars and educators. It had been selected as a fitting time for the assembled friends of the university to review with public honors the life and character of its late president, Francis Wayland, who within the year had passed from among us, and taken his place in the ranks of the illustrious dead. The time and place had been happily chosen. All the clustering associations of the day and the scene conspired to bring the late president to our thoughts. We were on the grounds where he had done his work and achieved his victories. Since his retirement from the presidency, we had been accustomed still to meet him at these annual gatherings. Now we missed his familiar presence. The feeling awakened by his absence was not unlike that which we have experienced when returning to the home of our youth for the first time after the death of an honored father. Our minds were in that mood of saddened thought just fitted to listen to a recital of his history, and to retrace and fill up for ourselves the outlines of such a moral and intellectual picture of our departed literary chief as we might be satisfied henceforth to cherish in our memory, and to carry with us as an incentive to honorable efforts and noble deeds.

The speaker also had been selected with the same good judgment. The task of delivering the commemorative address had been assigned to a distinguished pupil of the late president, one who, almost from the beginning, had been intimately associated with him in all his plans and efforts to promote the cause of learning and science, and the best interests of the university. To these advantages of the speaker for his work were united ripe scholarship, nice powers of discrimination, and an affection for his great master and friend, which insured for the task he had to perform all the zeal and fidelity that filial reverence could inspire. In a word, the work to be done and the man appointed to do it were very happily suited to each other. The subject for delineation had features strongly marked. The painter had seen them in all their varied play. As the result, we have, in the address delivered on that occasion, a portrait of Dr. Wayland's intellectual, moral, and religious character, such as all can recognize for its truthfulness, and the friends of the university may contemplate with equal pride and pleasure.

Having thus given free utterance to our cordial feelings of respect for the great worth and efficient labors of the late president, Dr. Wayland, no one can, with any show of justice, accuse us of wishing to pluck a single leaf from the chaplet of his well-earned fame. As little can any one accuse us of wishing to underrate the ability and artistic skill with which the filial piety of the pupil has striven to delineate the virtues, and embalm the memory, of his venerated master. We heartily rejoice in all the excellences of both, and proudly hold them as part of the accumulating treasures of our Alma Mater. But there are parts of the address from which we entirely dissent, and which excite our regret. These refer to the condition and administration of the college in the earlier periods of its existence, and especially in that of Dr. Wayland's immediate predecessor.

It has long been the fashion to speak of Brown University as though it had never risen much above the rank of a common academy until it came into the hands of President Wayland. This has been most industriously and persistently said

and sung. For more than a score of years, it was the staple of our *literary* entertainment at commencement dinners; and was served up to us, *ad nauseam*, in every variety of style and cookery, by those who never failed on these occasions to set forth in *prosè and verse* the marvellous virtues and achievements of the *new system*. We were gravely assured, that, before the introduction of this *new system*, the college was indeed but a poor affair. Its instructions had not only been limited in extent, but inferior in quality; its standard of scholarship had been low; and its discipline had been inefficiently administered: altogether, it had been a poor, sickly thing, and was nigh unto death.

Against all this we earnestly protest. It is *entirely unfair*, and in great part *untrue*. Of course, we do not mean to deny that great advances have been made in all these particulars; but we do mean to say, that, in comparison with other colleges of our country in those earlier times, Brown University had an honorable history, and had done good service in the cause of education, long before the presidency of Dr. Wayland. This we affirm; and, moreover, that it is the *duty*, and concerns the *honor*, of the institution, to maintain its just claims in this respect, and to guard the memory, and preserve a proper estimate of the worth and service, of those venerable men, who, in her day of small things, directed her affairs and helped to lay her foundation-stones. But, besides what is due to the university, there is in this matter a claim of personal justice which must not be overlooked. If, as we affirm, it is honorable and praiseworthy in the pupils of the late Dr. Wayland to cherish his memory with the jealous care of filial affection, then it can be no less creditable in those of his predecessor to be equally solicitous in claiming for *him* the measure of honor and fame which his great abilities, and long and faithful services in the college, do most justly demand. Nor is there here the least occasion for jealous rivalry. The full measure of merit conceded to the one detracts nothing from the just claims of the other. Both did good service in their day. President Messer had less means to work with, and ruder materials to build into his structure; but, with such as

he had, he builded well and skilfully. President Wayland followed, when the country had grown richer, and a higher standard of education was demanded and had become possible. The means at his command were more abundant, and the materials better prepared. He could, therefore, build on a larger scale; and the separate parts of his work might justly be expected to come from his hands with a finer finish. A mechanic who has a whole chest of tools may justly be expected to do more and better work than another who has only a jack-knife to work with. But this decides little in respect to the ability or fidelity of the men. Had their places been mutually interchanged, each, perhaps, might have done the other's work with equally good results. Justice rigidly demands that the ability of a workman should be measured as much by the *conditions* under which he works as by the *results* which he effects; and perhaps it would be difficult to find a case in which the application of this rule is more obviously indispensable to all the ends of justice than in that which arises from a comparison of the respective merits of Dr. Messer and Dr. Wayland in their official capacity as Presidents of Brown University.

When President Wayland took into his hands the reins of authority in Brown University, he at once proceeded to introduce many and very important changes in the course of studies and in the government and discipline of the college. These changes taken collectively were called the *New System*. Whether they were all wise or not, it is no part of our purpose now to inquire. They had been fixed on by Dr. Wayland as the plan upon which he intended to administer the affairs of the college; and it only remained for all who desired its prosperity, and meant to act a generous and manly part towards the new president, to give him their confidence in advance, and heartily to sustain him in carrying into effect the methods of instruction and discipline which he deemed essential to the success of the institution over which he had been called to preside. Accordingly, the friends of the college and of education, very generally felt it to be their duty, in hopeful anticipation, to speak favorably of the *new system*, without knowing

or pretending to know much of its intrinsic merits or demerits; and even such as entertained grave doubts of the wisdom of the plan felt that a fair experiment would be the only satisfactory test of the question. This was no more than a generous confidence, which the incoming president had a right to expect. But its first effect on the preceding administration of the college was both unfavorable and unjust. The *new system* was at once brought into strong contrast with the *old one*; and whatever was said in hopeful approval of the former, and with the view of giving it a fair trial, was very generally accepted as carrying with it a necessary censure and condemnation of the latter. As often happens in such cases, men did not reflect that each system had its excellences and its faults, that in some respects each was better than the other; and above all they did not comprehend the real and decisive point of comparison between them, which was their respective adaptation to the educational needs and capabilities of the country, and the successful working of the college, *at the time* when each was proposed and put into operation. This was the proper point of comparison to be taken between the two systems; and in this view each had its substantial merits. Each for *its time* was better than the other; and yet it is now confessed, even by the most zealous advocates of Dr. Wayland's *new measures*, that, on trial, they were found in several particulars not to work well; and therefore little by little fell into disuse and final rejection, and have, in some instances, been followed by a return to the old system.

In respect to the results and importance of the services rendered to the college, and to the interests of popular education, by the truly eminent men, Asa Messer and Francis Wayland, we think the time has *now* come when there should be a thoughtful and dispassionate review of the whole question; and, although we have neither the leisure nor the means at command to deal with the subject as it deserves, yet, in order to do such justice as we may to the name and memory of the late President Messer, we propose to invite attention very briefly to some of the differences in the condition and educational wants and possibilities of our country at the time

when he was placed in the presidency of Rhode-Island College and at the later period of its history when Dr. Wayland was called to preside over the same college, already risen to the higher and more honorable rank and title of Brown University.

When Rhode-Island College was founded, the country was still in its infancy. Less than one hundred and fifty years had elapsed since that little band of wanderers first set their feet on the rock at Plymouth. That century and a half had passed in exhausting wars with the Indians, and incessant struggles for the bare necessities of living. Shelter was to be sought from the storms and frosts of a rigorous climate. Food was to be gained by the sweat of the face out of a soil not overfruitful, rough, and hard of culture, and for the largest part overgrown with bushes, briers, and trees, which had to be cleared away by the hand of patient industry. Farms and fields were to be enclosed with fence; roads were to be made; and all the nameless wants incident to a new settlement in a new country, cut off from all civilization by the broad Atlantic, were pressing sorely and heavily on the people. These demands left them little time, and less means, for books and schools and colleges. Of the vast importance of these things, our forefathers were far from being ignorant or regardless. With a foresight and self-sacrifice seldom equalled, and never surpassed, they lost no time, and spared no pains, to do what they could for the cause of sound learning. Of necessity, however, their efforts in this behalf were chiefly directed to the mere rudiments of education. To *read*, *write*, and *cipher* was the *curriculum* of school learning, which bounded the ambition of most parents and most children. After a while, and much sooner than could have been expected, schools with a wider range of instruction, and even colleges, began to be established. But in a new country, where there were few books, and still fewer men qualified to teach, and where all the structures and preparations needful for schools and colleges had to be begun, made, and built up from the foundation, it could not be otherwise than that these institutions must move forward very slowly.

Under such circumstances, and in such feeble beginnings, Rhode-Island College had its origin. But scarcely had the institution got into working order, when its onward movements were seriously checked by the sudden breaking-out of the Revolutionary War, — that terrible struggle in which the nation came to its birth. After the strife was ended, the college again resumed its regular operations. But the war had left the people even poorer than it found them. Money was scarce; taxes were heavy. Only the very first rudiments of education could be had; and even from these many were excluded. Few parents could afford the expense of giving their sons a thorough preparation for college; and there were few schools where such a preparation could be obtained. Moreover, nearly all the sons of the richer class, either from the choice of their parents, or from the influence of the schools where their course of preparatory studies had to be conducted, were found to repair to Harvard or Yale, older and better-endowed seats of learning. It was clear, therefore, that, if Rhode-Island College was to have any students, it must draw them mostly from the less wealthy families, — such as the small traders, mechanics, and farmers. Students from this social position might have their full share of native ability and literary ambition; but a college for them must, of necessity, put its terms of entrance, its course of studies, and its rate of charges, on a lower and less expensive scale. To the wants and possibilities of such students, Rhode-Island College was accordingly adapted. The system was wisely conceived, both to promote the growth of the college, and to supply the then educational needs of the whole country. Diffusion of elementary knowledge, rather than completeness of scholarship, was at that time demanded. Society was loudly calling for men of education sufficient to enable them to enter upon the duties of the learned professions. On the farms and in the workshops of New England were scores of young men endowed with the requisite abilities, willing to study, and ambitious to fill these places of honor and emolument. All they wanted was the needful training. This Rhode-Island

College promised to do for them, and on terms within their reach. Such was the college in its first design.

In 1791, its first president, Dr. Manning, died. He was succeeded by the youthful Maxcy, a man of scholarly attainments, brilliant eloquence, and fascinating manners. To follow in the steps of such a man was no easy task. To this task Dr. Messer was called in 1802, after he had served the college with great credit for the period of eleven years, in the several offices of tutor, professor of languages, and professor of mathematics and natural philosophy. Though the people were now slowly recovering from the exhausting effects of the War of Independence, still they were very poor. Nearly all they had, or could earn, was necessarily absorbed in provisions for bare material comfort. The schools, even in New England, were still mostly confined to the simplest elements of instruction; and even of these schools the number was quite inadequate to the wants of the people. Of course, the same reasons which originally placed Rhode-Island College on the basis that we have already described, still forced the new president to adopt and continue the same general principles of administration. He had no choice. The college must have students, and it was obliged to take such as the country was able to send. The country must have educated men for the learned professions and other social needs, and it was obliged to accept such as the college could in the given circumstances furnish. These mutual necessities and dependencies of college and country continued on, with very little change, through nearly the whole period of Dr. Messer's presidency, — certainly till within a very few years of its close; for it must be remembered that in 1805, only three years after he had been invested with the government and responsibility of the college, our political relations with Great Britain began to wear a troubled and threatening aspect. This put a sudden stop to the incipient prosperity of the country, and especially in the New-England States, endangering, diminishing, and finally destroying their foreign commerce, then their principal source of business and profit. Meantime our disputes with England became more and

more violent and angry, till they brought us into a second war with that great and powerful nation. This diminished still further the ability of fathers to send their sons to college, and, on the other hand, drew many young men into the army; for young blood is quickly fired by the calls of patriotism and the stirring sounds of martial music. From the losses, changes in business, taxes, and other disastrous effects of this war, the nation had but just recovered, and was fairly beginning to improve its system of education, and to place its common schools and academies and colleges on a higher platform, when in 1826 Dr. Messer tendered to the corporation his resignation of the presidency of Brown University. During this whole period of twenty-four years, — as this recital of facts clearly shows, — there was no time when any material changes in the administration could have been introduced with safety to the college and benefit to the country. Certainly to have raised the requirements for admission, to have enlarged the course of undergraduate studies, and to have correspondingly increased the annual charges, — which must have been a necessary consequence of such changes, — would have been to close the doors of the college against more than half the young men, who, as things then were, found admittance within its walls, and there pursued their studies with credit to the institution; and who have since reflected honor upon their Alma Mater by the distinguished services they have rendered, and the responsible offices they have filled in Church and State. To have shut out from the institution these men, at this time, would have been an irreparable loss to the college and the country. Neither could have afforded it. Yet that such loss must have followed upon any considerable changes in the administration of the college in Dr. Messer's day, we think has been clearly shown. If any thing were wanting to the proof, it is abundantly supplied in the fact, that in 1827, when these and other changes were introduced by Dr. Wayland, he found no little trouble in carrying them into effect. Fewer students entered the college. Many left their classes. For several years, the classes became smaller and smaller; nor, during the whole twenty-nine

years of Dr. Wayland's presidency, did the number of annual graduates ever again rise as high as it had been under Dr. Messer. This, beyond question, proves, that, even then, the country was hardly prepared for the changes introduced. Had they been attempted at an earlier date, the result must have been utterly disastrous.

We now turn back and take a brief review of the policy and results of Dr. Messer's administration. His policy was that of demand and supply. He offered the country such a college education as it could pay for ; and such, too, as the necessities of its condition then compelled it gladly to accept. Here we have the rule by which he fixed the requirements for matriculation, and the whole subsequent course of undergraduate studies. Here, too, we see the reason for that system of rigid economy, which under his management pervaded every department of the institution. It was to bring the benefits of college life and instruction within the reach of as many as possible ; and we may add, in passing, that this was *then* in full harmony with the spirit of the times. President Messer did all he could to invite and encourage young men of literary aspirations. For all such he had the tenderness of a father. Hence the plan of college commons. Hence, too, the disposition of the *vacations*, assigning the *long* one to the winter, that the students might help out their scanty means by teaching the common schools of the country, then taught almost only in that season of the year. By this many a poor young man was not a little assisted in his praiseworthy struggles to educate himself ; while at the same time it was a very great benefit to the cause of popular education in all the country towns ; for hereby they were able to get a better class of school-masters than they could have otherwise obtained.

It is not easy for us now to feel the full force of the reasons which led to this policy, nor to picture to our minds the full extent and magnitude of the happy results that then followed it. Under its benign influence, hundreds of young men who had otherwise been doomed to a life of comparative ignorance and inefficiency were able to lay the foundation of intellectual culture and future usefulness ; and the whole country, not less

than themselves, shared in the wide-spread and lasting benefits. It is not too much to say that more than half the graduates were then of this class. Some worked their way through by their own indomitable and persevering efforts; others were assisted by the labors and self-denying sacrifices of parents. Brothers proudly and generously gave their hard earnings for the brother at college, and for the honor of the family. Noble-hearted sisters too, at home, toiled early and late, limiting their wardrobe and abridging their amusements, to help a favorite brother through college. Nor were these sons and brothers, on their part, wanting in courage and self-denial. Not a few of them entered college after only six or eight months given to the study of Greek and Latin. Others had no preparation but such as they had made alone by themselves in hours snatched from the daily toil of the farm and the workshop. Others still, while preparing for college, spent their days in teaching, and gave their nights to study. Once admitted into college, they were all ready cheerfully to practice the most rigid economy. They studied hard. They lived plainly. They taught school in the *long* vacation. When necessity compelled, they sometimes left their class; and, when they had obtained the means, they returned again to college to finish the course and take their degree. The rich and happy fruits of all this are to be seen in the subsequent history of these men. The last half-century will show them to you in every part of the land. In the churches, the colleges, the schools, the halls of legislation, the courts of justice, in the practice of the healing art, and in all the departments of social industry where science and skill are to be put in requisition, they have done and are still doing a noble work. All through our newly-settled States and Territories they have been seen marching in the van of civilization, holding up the torch of science and religion, and doing their full share in supplying and working the intellectual, moral, and Christian forces, which alone can give health, strength, progress, and stability to the nation. Such results are a proud testimony to the wisdom and ability of Asa Messer as a college president and an educator of young men. In them, he has raised for himself a monument more honorable and

more enduring than columns of marble or tablets of brass. In the heart of many a noble man still lives, and, while his life lasts, will live, the grateful memory of what he owes to the kind and encouraging words, the wise counsels, and the warm and genial friendship, of the third president of Brown University.

In the foregoing remarks, we have had occasion so often to contrast the condition and educational needs and capabilities of our country during Dr. Messer's presidency with the same during Dr. Wayland's, that little more will now have to be said on that point. Just previous to 1827, the country had been enjoying some years of continued prosperity. In that time many persons had become rich; and the people seemed to be all at once waking up to the consciousness of their growing wealth. The simple manners and rigid economy of former years began to be thrown aside. Expensive tastes and habits were rapidly forming. Men were no longer satisfied with living as their fathers had. The whole platform of domestic and social life was rising to a higher level. The system of popular education too had felt the movement. Schools and schools-houses were improved and multiplied. A wider circle of studies was introduced. Teachers were better paid. Meantime a higher grade of schools had grown up, expressly designed to prepare young men for college. To these schools the richer families, now become numerous in the community, very generally sent their sons. Here they passed through a more thorough and extended course of preparatory training. This general uplifting of the whole basis of popular instruction now began to demand a corresponding elevation and enlargement of the course of studies in the colleges. Besides this, it now began to be felt that our colleges required to be placed under a severer system of discipline and moral restraint. This arose from an already great and still increasing change in the *age and character* of the students. Until recently, most of those who had entered our colleges were *young men*. They came of their own choice, and had worked hard to get there. They had no time and no money to waste in idleness and folly. They came with an

earnest purpose to prepare themselves for the places of honor and responsibility which they had in view, and hoped some day to occupy. Such young men needed little stimulus and less restraint. But now *boys* were sent to college. Many of them had no definite object in view. They did not look to their education as the means of future support, or usefulness, or distinction in life. They had thus far been provided for, and they left the future to take care of itself. They had plenty of money to spend; and the warm blood and heedless impulses of youth disposed them to think more of pleasure than knowledge, of amusement than study. Of necessity, this state of things called for a stronger and more vigilant college government.

At this time, 1827, Dr. Wayland succeeded to the presidency of Brown University. He accepted the popular demand for severer discipline and higher scholarship, and at once prepared to supply it. Every thing favored the attempt. Not only had the richer and generally improved condition of the people prepared the way, but the merchant princes and manufacturers of the land had now begun, more liberally than ever before, to turn the streams of their accumulated wealth and increasing profits to the aid and endowment of colleges and all the higher institutions of learning and science. The attempt would require money, and there was reason to expect it. The Congregationalists in Massachusetts had recently erected and were liberally supporting a new college at Amherst. Why should not the Baptists rally in a generous and united support of *their* college in Rhode Island? Dr. Wayland believed they would. With these encouragements, and seeing too that some other colleges had already begun to do the same thing, he set himself to the arduous task of introducing into Brown University a severer discipline, a wider range of studies, and a higher standard of scholarship. Public sentiment was with him. He was ably supported and cheered on in his work by the counsel and money of ardent and liberal friends. The old patrons of the college seemed to vie with great numbers of new ones in generous gifts to increase the library and erect a suitable building for it, to endow professor-

ships and scholarships, and to procure apparatus and construct buildings for the experimental sciences. The facilities for a liberal education in Brown University were thus greatly increased and multiplied. We accept them as highly valuable improvements in the condition of our Alma Mater. We also concede to the indomitable will, the energetic perseverance, and the great abilities of Dr. Wayland, a large share in the merit of effecting them; and, on every occasion which suggests his name, grateful emotions never fail to spring up in our hearts for what he did in this behalf. Here we rest this point. Whether, under the same circumstances and with the same generous assistance, Dr. Messer would have done as much for the college, we have no special occasion to express an opinion, though we see no reason to doubt that he would; but we do repeat our confident belief of what we have before said, that at no time much earlier than this could these improvements have been made by Dr. Wayland, or by any other man. To have raised the terms of admission, and enlarged the circle of studies, and thus, by necessary consequence, to have nearly or quite doubled the expenses, would in Dr. Messer's day have been an impossibility. It would have simply shut up the college. The country was not then ready for such changes. Looking now at the present state of the university, and regarding it as in no small degree the result of improvements begun by Dr. Wayland, we are ready to concede (and we rejoice that it is so) that the course of undergraduate studies is now more liberal, and the instructions of a riper quality, than they were in our day. We also most cheerfully concede that, with these better helps and this wider field of culture, many of the students now leave college with greater attainments and a more finished scholarship than could be found when *we* were in those classic halls; but we do not believe, that, taken class by class, more study is now done, or more actual acquirements are now made, in the four years of the undergraduate course, than we ourselves witnessed in the less favored times of our worthy and venerable president, Dr. Messer.

In representing Dr. Messer's administration as having been systematically planned, and conducted by him with a cherished

design to favor and encourage the education of the sons of the less opulent families in the country, it is far from our intention to admit, or even to leave room for, the inference, that the education there received was for that reason less valuable in itself, or less useful for all the practical purposes of life, than that which was then to be obtained at greater cost at Harvard or Yale; and much less do we mean to say that motives of economy were the *only* ones which then attracted young men to the halls of Brown University: but we do mean to say that the economical arrangements devised and persisted in by President Messer made it possible for young men of limited means to obtain the benefits of college life and instruction, and that he deliberately intended this as the result of his system. To this we appeal as one of the proofs of the soundness of his judgment and the benevolence of his heart. We proudly record it among the purest, and not least enduring, of the honors that cluster around his memory. We moreover affirm that these economical arrangements did attract to the college during his presidency large numbers of students (full one-half of each class); that, without these young men, the college would not have been respectable in numbers, and would have been sustained only with very great difficulty; and that, in their several classes, these students won for themselves their full proportion of college honors, and as men and citizens did afterwards reflect their full proportion of honor upon their Alma Mater. For proof we appeal to the Triennial Catalogue. Let any man there examine the several classes from 1802 to 1826, and learn the *antecedents* of the students, and then follow out the history of their subsequent lives and deeds, and he will be obliged to confess that our statement is far within the truth. As we have already said, for young men struggling to obtain a college education, and working in the chains of the *res angustæ domi*, Dr. Messer had a heart of fatherly tenderness. Wherever he saw eager aspirations after knowledge, a high sense of duty, and a resolute determination to prepare for an honorable and useful discharge of the responsibilities of life, there he was ever ready with the words of encouragement and the hand of help. As president of a col-

lege, he offered to this class of young men not a *poorer* but a *cheaper* education. A skilful manufacturer strives to bring his fabrics into market, not by reducing their quality but by cheapening their production. Precisely so Dr. Messer exerted his great abilities to cheapen the cost of education. This he effected by many wise arrangements, but chiefly by imposing upon himself, and requiring of his associates in the faculty of instruction, a very uncommon burden of duty. During most of his administration, in addition to the duties of president, he performed those of professor of mathematics, and also those of professor of natural philosophy. By these *extra* labors, he was able to afford an education equal to that obtained at other colleges, but at less cost. In this he rendered an invaluable service to his college, to his country, and especially to those young men who thus found the means of a liberal education brought within their reach.

But other motives besides those of economy attracted students to the college while it was under the presidency of Dr. Messer. A popular opinion was then widely prevailing, that, for most of the practical purposes of life, an education at Brown was better than one at Harvard. This was thought to be particularly applicable to the department of English studies, to composition and oratory. There can be no doubt that the young men trained up under Dr. Messer were distinguished for habits of manly thought and self-reliant investigation tempered with conservative good sense ; and there can be as little doubt, that, for these high qualities, they were greatly indebted to the liberal sentiments, and the wide-reaching, independent, and yet well-balanced mind, of the President.

Still another cause at that time contributed very considerably to enhance the practical value of an education at Brown University. There were then in the college two literary societies, composed of undergraduates. These had large and valuable libraries. These volumes were very generally read by the students. But the principal value of these societies was found in their frequent stated meetings for practice in *debate*, and for reading, and criticising *compositions*. Emulation was thus excited in the useful arts of

writing and speaking. The students thus accustomed themselves to think upon the great questions of the day, and acquired the power of using their knowledge so as most effectually to convince and persuade others. From these debates they went forth to instruct society, and to sway popular assemblies by their eloquence. Facts show that those who were then most active in these societies as writers and debaters have since done most for themselves and for the world. Here they trained their youthful faculties, and acquired the skill which has since made their power felt. From these societies, they looked out upon the theatre before them; and prepared for the battles to be fought, and the work to be done, in the great world of living men where they were expecting to act their part. By these exercises, the graduates of Brown University were prepared when they went forth into the world, very soon to acquire an enviable distinction as popular speakers, ready debaters, men of good sense, and actual power in the conduct of affairs. Hence the opinion then widely prevalent, that, for all practical purposes, an education in Brown University was even more desirable than one in most of the other colleges. This result was in no small degree due to the president, who always looked upon these societies as important auxiliaries in his work, and warmly cherished them by his counsels and his encouragement. We are sorry that they are now so far abandoned. One of the best methods of practical training is here lost to the students. We do not believe that any equivalent has been found in the secret societies that have taken their place. Beyond all question, it is a disgrace to the students, if not to some higher powers, that those libraries are left, as they now are, to be scattered, wasted, and utterly destroyed.

Here perhaps we might lay aside our pen, and consider our task as done. But such persistent efforts have been made, in almost every conceivable way, by commencement-dinner speeches, by newspaper paragraphs, by sermons and eulogies, to magnify the marvellous efficacy of the *new system*, and to sound far and wide the transcendent merits of Dr. Wayland as an educator of young men, that we feel compelled to subject

the successive administrations of President Messer and President Wayland to one or two more tests in order to discover and bring into fair comparison the actual results of each; and it can hardly be necessary for us to say that we do this with sincere respect and admiration for both these distinguished men.

The first test which we propose to apply shall be drawn from the *graduates*. Dr. Messer's administration covered twenty-four years. The whole number of graduates was six hundred and ninety-three, giving an annual average of twenty-nine. Dr. Wayland's administration embraced twenty-nine years. The whole number of graduates was eight hundred and thirteen, giving an annual average of twenty-eight. Now, when we consider the greater population, and the greater wealth of the country, during Dr. Wayland's presidency, we submit that this result is even more creditable to his predecessor than to himself.

We pass now from the *number* to the *character* of the graduates. That a higher grade of scholarship was fixed, and perhaps pretty generally attained, under Dr. Wayland, we frankly concede; but, as we have already shown, this is attributable to the greater advantages which were put into his hands: and, moreover, it must be borne in mind that mere scholarship is not the only nor the most *decisive* test of the value of education. A pure and elevated ideal of usefulness in life, a fixedness of purpose which yields to no difficulties, a spirit of thorough investigation, mental discipline, self-denial, these are elements of *character*, which rise in value far above any particular attainments in scholarship. In imparting to his pupils these high qualities of *character*, Dr. Messer was eminently successful, and in no degree inferior to his successor. To illustrate this we have need of a third term for comparison, and we employ for this purpose the graduates of other colleges. Using this, then, as our term of measure, we say that the graduates under Dr. Messer compare as favorably with those of other New-England colleges at that time as do the graduates under Dr. Wayland with those of the same colleges in his time. The public history of these different gradu-

ates proves this beyond a doubt. The graduates of Brown University have always, in all the high qualities of the man and the citizen, proved themselves fully equal to the contemporary graduates of other colleges in our country; but we have yet to learn that in this respect, or in any other respect, the graduates under Dr. Wayland have exhibited any superiority over those who took their guiding inspirations from the lessons of Dr. Messer. Of the latter, a larger proportion entered the learned professions. But this, probably, may be attributed to the stronger inducements recently held out in the avenues of business and trade, and which have, therefore, drawn a larger proportion of the later graduates into these lucrative employments. Tried, therefore, by the *number* or *character* of its graduates, we do not perceive that Dr. Wayland's administration has any advantage in its results over that of Dr. Messer.

We now propose to apply another test, drawn from a comparison of the condition of the college at the beginning and end of Dr. Messer's presidency, with its condition at the beginning and end of Dr. Wayland's. This will show the growth and progress of the institution during the two periods in question, and open a fair ground of comparison between them in this respect.

From the Triennial Catalogue of 1866, it appears that in 1802, when Dr. Messer entered upon the presidency, there was no professor in the whole undergraduate course, and only one in the faculty. There were also three tutors. When he retired, there were *nine* professors in all, and two tutors; and, of these professors, four were actually engaged in giving instruction to the undergraduates, and a fifth had for a year been abroad, gathering materials and making acquisitions for the more successful discharge of the duties of his professorship. During Dr. Messer's administration, three *new* professorships were established,—one of moral philosophy and metaphysics, one of oratory and polite literature, and one of chemistry; and, at the time of his resignation, these important departments of college instruction were filled, and their duties regularly discharged, by men eminently dis-

tinguished in their several professions. The qualifications for admission, and the undergraduate course of studies, had, in the mean time, been gradually and very considerably elevated and enlarged; and near the close of Dr. Messer's presidency, by the munificence of the late Nicholas Brown, a new, large, and substantial brick edifice was erected for the accommodation of students.

President Wayland, of course, found the university as his predecessor left it. Under his administration, as we have already said, the course of undergraduate studies was still further improved. Two large buildings were erected, one for a chapel and library, and one for the experimental sciences; and the library and philosophical apparatus were greatly enlarged. When he retired, he left seven professors, all actively engaged in their respective departments; but the office of tutor had been abolished.

Now, when we take into consideration the condition of the country and the state of education during these two administrations, and when we further consider, that, under Dr. Messer, the college was left almost, if not entirely, to defray its current expenses by the charges on the students, while under Dr. Wayland large sums were annually given to make up for deficiencies in this respect, we feel a confident assurance in saying that the result of this comparison is, to say the least, quite as much to the honor of Dr. Messer as to that of Dr. Wayland.

A most remarkable man was President Messer. In body and mind, God had formed him on a scale of large proportions. His manly form and benevolent face are now standing full in the writer's eye. The strong grasp of his hand, the frank and cheerful welcome of his hearty laugh, the unaffected goodness and tenderness of his nature, can never be forgotten. No man ever had a higher appreciation of excellence, or a stronger feeling of scorn and hatred for every act of meanness and injustice. No president ever cherished a livelier interest in the welfare of his students, or dealt more wisely and kindly with the erring, as long as there was any room to hope for their improvement. His approving smile was a cordial to the

good. His reproof was terrible, and came out with an honest and hearty indignation, which it seemed impossible for him to suppress. But, through the dark clouds of his severest displeasure, the sunshine of his tenderness and paternal goodness never failed to appear; and few ever felt the blow without acknowledging both its justice and the fatherly kindness from whence it came. But we cannot undertake to draw the portrait of such a man. We leave the work to be done by some one who has a power of analysis and of graphic delineation more equal to the attempt.

We have now finished the task which we undertook. We know it is very imperfectly done. It neither does justice to the heart of the writer nor to the worth and character of his early friend; but, such as it is, we humbly offer it as the sincere tribute of a grateful pupil to the memory of his loved and honored president. It has been a satisfaction to withdraw for a few hours from the urgent demands of professional duty, and to indulge these pleasant reminiscences, retracing in our mind the noble qualities of the instructor of our youth, and renewing our confession that to him we owe more than it would be in our power to express. Imperfectly, however, as our work has been done, we believe that no one can read what we have written without a feeling of admiration for the signal wisdom with which Dr. Messer conducted the affairs of the college; and that all fair and honorable men will heartily agree with us when we say, that, as President of Brown University, the name of Asa Messer well deserves to stand side by side, and to share in equal honor, with the names of James Manning and Jonathan Maxcy and Francis Wayland.

